DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 889 CS 504 874

AUTHOR Madsen, Sandra
TITLE Strategies for Seeking Employment in the Small College.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Indianapolis, IN, April 4-6, 1985).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Faculty; Educational Trends; *Employment Patterns; *Employment Qualifications; Higher Education; Job Skills; *Small Colleges; *Speech Communication

ABSTRACT

Since American colleges and universities will need to hire about 500,000 faculty members in the next 25 years, it is important that speech communication graduate schools and current graduate students who will be in that labor pool think about the professional needs of small schools as potential employers of speech faculty. The academic background of an applicant is the foremost qualification to be considered in a hiring decision. Small colleges seek the best qualified people available, usually doctorates from quality graduate programs who have shown an inclination toward scholarship. The second requirement is a commitment to teaching. Small colleges can no longer afford to hire PhDs solely interested in research; the strongest selling point for these small colleges will continue to be friendly, caring treatment of undergraduates by highly educated faculty members. One other criterion is collegiality--the ability to get along with peers. Ultimately, choosing a small school for a career must reflect an individual's desire to work at the undergraduate level, to prefer active participation in the classroom to research in depth, and to view communication less as a specific field of study to be pursued in depth, and more as a central set of theories and skills that need to be integrated into the total curriculum of an institution. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED254889

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Strategies for Seeking Employment in the Small College

Sandra Madsen

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sandra Madsen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS504874

Strategies for Seeking Employment in the Small College

Sandra Madsen
Buena Vista College

Howard R. Bowen, Professor of Economics and Education at Claremont Graduate School, observed in the Nov. 7 Chronicle of Higher Education, "American colleges and universities will need to hire about 500,000 faculty members in the next 25 years, thereby replacing virtually the entire professoriate."[1] He goes on to point out that while these hirings will be slow over the next decade, they will be continuous and will accelerate as current tenured faculty reach retirement age in the coming years. Many of these new faculty members will find themselves seeking employment in small colleges, either by choice or by happenstance. With that possibility looming large, it is important for the graduate schools and current graduate students who will be in that labor pool to think about the professional needs of these small school employers. My paper will use my own small experience as both a faculty member and administrator responsible for hiring as a case study of small school needs and practices.

In order to understand the perspective from which my comments arise, I must first describe the small college setting in which I operate. Our total enrollment is 950 students, with 55 full time faculty and an assortment of part time people. The speech/drama department consists of the equivalent of three full time people, one in drama and two in speech. The two positions in speech consist of one full time speech person and two people who are 1/2 speech and 1/2 something else. This small department within a small school offers a total of 18 different courses, four of them offered repeatedly or in multiple sections to serve the general education function. Simple mathematics will reveal that each faculty member is offering three to four classes each semester and the same number of course preparations. Added to this course load is the 4-1-4 calendar that we use, which forces preparation of an additional new, innovative, and exciting course during the January term. The usual duties of all faculty members are also expected of our people--committee work, student advising, research and professional society activity. We are, of course, expected to remain warm, friendly and personable throughout all of our duties, since that is the essence of what we are selling to the students that we recruit.

My own background is perhaps typical of what happens to a person who leaves the world of graduate school to embark upon a career in a small college. My PhD work is in rhetorical theory. I would have expected to teach courses in American Public Address, History and Criticism of Public Address, Theories of Speech Criticism, perhaps a little Greek and Roman Theory and, if hard pressed, an introductory course in public speaking--the advanced variety preferably. An ideal situation would also have allowed me to teach courses in my research area, the Rhetoric of the Woman Suffrage Movement, and in its latest extension, Gender Communication.

Had I been employed by a major university, I would have expected to teach some of the aforementioned courses each semester, specializing in women's rhetoric and women's history. I would also have expected to have release time to continue this research interest, to serve on committees, and to direct graduate work. Even if I had focused my interest on the undergraduate curriculum, I would have expected to teach several courses beyond my immediate research interest, such as American Public Address or History and Criticism, and again to have had release time for advising students and working with the forensics program. I would especially not expect to teach in January.

The reality of my situation as a member of a small department in a small college bears little resemblance to what I have just outlined. As a speech teacher, I taught only one course of those I listed in my background--Rhetoric of the Woman Suffrage Movement--and I taught it only in occasional January terms

during the thirteen years I served. My regular semester load consisted of two sections of interpersonal communication, and one upper division course in group discussion, argumentation, persuasion, and general semantics (rotated among faculty members and offered in alternate years). I also had the exclusive privilege of coaching the forensics program.

In addition to this teaching load, I served on at least one and usually two committees per year, attended conventions such as this and advised a fair share of students, few of them speech/drama majors. My teaching position can best be described as a service function to the larger institution, and the courses offered in the joint speech/drama major are, of necessity, limited to bare bones offerings.

I am not trying to suggest that I have spent the last 13 years laboring through the 9 circles of Dante's Inferno. I have found my classes stimulating, the research needed to prepare for them has kept me growing in my field, and my interests have continued to expand. I am suggesting that my graduate studies, in very limited ways, prepared me for the teaching assignments that I subsequently encountered and I don't believe that my professional path is atypical. I believe many people with my background and training are increasingly finding themselves employed in small school environments.

Current demographic trends have provided a supply of potential faculty members that up to this point exceed the demand, so that colleges and universities can have their pick of the new recipients of doctorates. Colleges such as mine, which for years, even through the sixties, were unable to attract PhD's or even masters candidates from prestigious universities, are now able to attract large pools of candidates, well qualified candidates, for almost every opening. In light of this trend, I would like to point to the three variables that a small school such as mine considers in the hiring process--credentials, commitment and collegiality.

The academic background of an individual is the first, and foremost, qualification to be considered in a hiring decision. Small colleges no less than large universities seek the best qualified people available. And best qualified usually is translated as PhD from a quality graduate program who has shown an inclination toward scholarship and a willingness to continue in that direction--and as I have suggested, we are increasingly able to get just that.

While most faculty members can understand the importance of the scholarship and depth of commitment to a discipline as a requisite of graduate teaching or even to large programs in speech communication, they often feel unprepared for the courses which they offer in the small school. Yet as small schools increasingly seek excellence to attract students, there is a place for such professionalism. The conflict comes in providing the service courses that are a part of general education or distribution requirements at most schools.

The graduate school model relied heavily on teaching assistants to provide that service function, to allow the senior faculty the luxury of indulging their own interest area. As University of Chicago Professor Wayne Booth said in his 1982 presidential address to the Modern Language Association:

> "We have chosen--no one required it of us--to say to the world, almost in so many words, that we do not care who teaches the nonmajors or under what conditions, as long as the troublesome hordes move on and out: forced in by requirements, forced out by discouragement, or by disgust, or by literal failure. The great public fears or despises us because we hire a vast army of underpaid flunkies to teach the so-called service courses, so that we can gladly teach, in our advanced courses, those precious souls who survive the gauntlet. Give us lovers and we will love them, but do not expect us to study courtship. If we had decided to run up a flag on the quad saying that we care not a whit whether our society consists of people who practice critical understanding, so long as we are left free to teach advanced courses, we could not have given a clearer message"[2]

Most PhD holders were those teaching assistants, relegated to the ranks of the underpaid workers in the service courses, and upon conferring of the degree had hoped to find themselves among the ranks of the senior professoriate. Upon entering the small college environment, they are distressed to find themselves once again teaching the lowly service course. The problem is that this perspective on the service course overlooks the preparation in a discipline which should be a prerequisite to teaching one of these courses, be it interpersonal communication or public speaking. The person who chooses to teach interpersonal communication well should have a firm grounding in theories of perception and cognition, more than a passing knowledge of general semantics and nonverbal behavior, as well as being adept as small group processes and conflict negotiation. The ability to use gaming and simulation and experiential learning theories as teaching techniques will enhance the classroom climate. Finally, the ability to include references to business communication, family communication, male/female communication and other specialized contexts will make the course adaptive to a broad population.

Public speaking, the staple to most undergraduate programs, need be no less rigorous. A well-taught course requires knowledge of argumentation and persuasion theory, of listening and learning theories, of critical evaluation of the speaking process and an appreciation of the role of public address in a democratic society. A good dose of ethics in communication could probably be included to the advantage of all students.

Assuming that these two courses, interpersonal and public speaking, make up the service component and perhaps even the bulk of the load of a small college teacher, the required credentials for teaching at a small school have already been sketched. I am not saying that every small school forces its faculty to teach the entire gamut of the speech/theatre discipline, although there are some that do. Rather, I am suggesting that a broader diversity of teaching options will exist in the small college than in the larger research institutions. The research skills learned in graduate school do have a place in the small institutions. As the Association of American Colleges' Project on Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees recently pointed out, "the enemy of good teaching is not research, but rather the spirit that says that this is the only worthy or legitimate task for faculty members. An emphasis on teaching, moreover, does not require the denigration of research. The finest teachers are often the best researchers."[3]

Thus, while academic credentials at the small college will require the terminal degree, a small college is probably less interested in the depth to which one has pursued the rhetoric of a minor orator than in the breadth of preparation in the field of rhetoric generally, and the secondary interests which are reflected in course work, in the BA and MA degrees and in the candidate's interests for the future. Researchers, in the narrowest sense of the work, are not highly prized. People interested in continuing to educate themselves on a variety of issues applicable to the range of teaching assignments, and who can maintain academic discipline with minimal stimulation by fellow travelors, are also to be prized.

The second requirement is commitment to teaching. Recent national reports have condemned a trend which has been a serious problem to small school all along--the emphasis is graduate school on producing researchers with narrow interests rather than teachers. The AAC project suggests that

> "central to the troubles and to the solution are the professors, for the development that overwhelmed the old curriculum and changed the entire nature of higher education was the transformation of the professors from teachers concerned with the characters and minds of their students to professionals, scholars with PhD degrees with an allegiance to academic disciplines stronger than their commitment to teaching or to the life of the institutions where they are employed.

> As appropriate as research is as the focus on energies and resourses in the research university, the exclusive concern with research in the training of recipients of the PhD degree--to the neglect of any concern with teaching or with any professional responsibility other than to scholarship--has encouraged college faculties to abandon the sense of corporate responsibility that characterized professors of the pre-professional era."[4]

Small colleges, faced with declining enrollments and tight Federal and gift money, can not afford to hire PhD's solely interested in research. Their strongest selling point has been, and will continue to be, friendly caring treatment of undergraduates by highly educated faculty members. Excellence in the classroom must be the factor which sets us apart. But our ability to provide quality teaching is limited by our ability to hire people to fit Howard Bowen's description. The ideal characteristics for a faculty member are--"a sound general education," "intellectual breadth and a contemplative disposition," "keen mastery of the special field and the motivation to keep up to date," and "the ability to serve as exemplars to some students."[5]

Many schools claim to place emphasis on teaching, but they tend to provide the larger rewards to those people who publish. In small schools, the money tends to be placed squarly on the faculty member who relates well to students both in and out of the classroom. Thus, when a small college seeks a faculty member, they look to evidence of teaching experience and success, even if it is only experience as a teaching assistant during graduate school, it is an essential ingredient to being hired.

A final criterion would be collegiality. The ability to get along with one's peers is essential in any institution but the skills necessary at a small school may be slightly different. In a large school or department, the ability to speak the specialized language of one's field may be the first step in achieving acceptance. Recognizing the name of Kenneth Burke, being able to name any of the attic orators, or having passing familiarity with the names of the last five presidents of CSSA may go far toward moving a new person into the inner circle of acceptability. In a small school there may be no other person, or at best one or two other people, who speak your specialized language. And if the department consists of radio-tv, drama and speech, there may be no common language apparent in the discourse. Even the pairing of a rhetorician with a small group person can lead to language difficulties and no common ground.

More than likely, one's peers at a small college will come from the larger groupings found in Divisions such as mine, which is labeled Language and Literature and consists of speech and drama, English, languages and mass communication. A second element of collegiality is being able to work with the "common grouping" to guarantee that one gets a "slice of the departmental pie". Drawing students or FTE's is important everywhere, but in a large school a loss of students may mean a reduction of <u>one</u> faculty member in the speech department. In a small school, a reduction can mean the elimination of <u>the one</u> faculty member, and the extinction of the program. The solution in many cases involves choosing between staffing a full-fledged speech major, or offering to provide the service courses to the larger institution which will guarantee the presence of speech somewhere in the curriculum.

Even where it is feasible to offer a full-fledged speech major, it may still be necessary to reach out to other disciplines to guarantee viable numbers. The key to full classes is the ability to convince colleagues in English, business, education, social work or what have you departments that your course offerings could be included in their requirements for the major or as recommended supporting work. You may also have to convince the academic standards committee that speech communication belongs in any general education requirements passed by the institution. But the ability to persuade colleagues to support your program involves a willingness to reciprocate. You must also be willing to include

courses from their departments in your major or recommendations, and the courses that attract nonmajors must become adaptive to the needs not only of speech communication majors, but of these other majors now represented in the classroom. One need not offer watered down courses to achieve this end, but some indication of adaptation is necessary to a continued working relationship among disciplines.

Again, because of the limits of size, many small schools cannot offer the range of specialized courses offered at major universities. This limit is often offset by cross-disciplinary offerings and by 4-1-4 calendar which provide diversity within the set curriculum. This approach to diversity requires faculty members who are able to look beyond their own disciplines in order to see relationships that can be developed across disciplinary lines. Speech communication is a logical center ground for much of the cross-pollination which occurs, whether it is the rhetoric of a historical figure or period, argument and scientific theory, or simply small group processes and business management. Our methodology as well as our content areas span so many fields that the opportunities for team teaching are endless. But these opportunities will only materialize if the personality of the person in the speech position is such as to reach out to shape these occasions.

Collegiality also extends to committee work, and there is ample opportunity to demonstrate these skills on most small college campuses. Collegiality is not a hard quality to demonstrate, especially for a person in speech communication. An articulate and willing new faculty member will be given ample opportunity to take part in small college activities, from committee meetings to student activities, and all that is necessary to achieve the goals of longevity is a willing attitude to reach out to this larger constituency.

This overview of the workload and working conditions at a small college is not intended to discourage a person from seeking employment in such an environment. There are other factors which favor employment at a small school. Balanced against the inability to teach only one's research interest area is the opportunity for diversity, to explore new fields, to follow avocation as well as vocational interests. Changing career focus is easier in a setting where you are not locked into one teaching format and content area. Offering new or different courses is also facilitated by the smaller, less formal bureacracy which occurs in small schools. While other colleagues must be consulted about change, they need be less protective about their territory, especially if you are the only speech person and thus may pick any part of the field to work with.

A second plus is the reduction in pressure to publish at all costs. Publications certainly are important, but they should be motivated by interest in the area rather than seeing one's work in print in order to continue to be employed. With the emphasis on good teaching linked to scholarly growth, publishing can occur at your interest level rather than at administrative fiat.

Finally, the opportunity to work with undergraduate students and feel a direct investment in their future can be very rewarding. Similarly, working closely with faculty members across all fields of interest can help one to look at the field of speech communication in new and exciting ways.

Ultimately, the choice of a small school must reflect an individual's desire to work at the undergraduate level, to prefer active participation in the classroom to research in depth, and to view communication less as a specific field of study to be pursued in depth, and more as a central set of theories and skills which need to be integrated into the total curriculum of an institution. Should this seem to be your calling, let me then address the hiring process that you might encounter.

The hiring process which brings a candidate with quality credentials, commitment to teaching and collegiality to the small school setting is probably not unique. Positions at our institution, which we advertise nationally in conformity with affirmative action guidelines, are all currently tenure track unless they are for replacement of a faculty member on sabbatical.

By this I mean that we have not yet resorted to the device of keeping ourselves from being tenured in or protecting the tenured deadwood by rotating a series of masters degree candidates through a two-year employment pattern and then dropping them for another similar candidate. We seek highly qualified professionals who could be expected to make a long term commitment to the position. While our salaries, like most educational institutions, do not adequately compensate faculty members for their education and ability, they are in some cases higher than in many state institutions which are now being forced to tighten the belt as tax revenues continue to shrink.

After soliciting applications, we move to the selection process. At our institution, all members of the Division read through all credentials and recommend the most likely candidates. If no consensus on one or two top candidates emerges, we conduct a telephone conference interview with the top contenders to try to limit our choices to the required one or two. The candidate knows the call will be coming, so hopefully is prepared. This interview allows us to probe the credentials and academic preparation of the candidate. But beyond that it also serves as a test of collegiality. Does this person sound knowledgeable and like "our kind of person." Admittedly, a phone call may not be the best way to answer either of those questions, but we have used this approach to limit our options for interviewing, and have found it revealing in many cases.

Once our pool is limited to the people we wish to see in person, our marathon interview schedule begins. Administration is obviously involved. The Division people also must be included since they will work most closely with the person hired. In addition to the Division people, we also include faculty members from outside the division to again verify the person's fit with the larger institution. The final element in our evaluation is an encounter with students who are majors or participants in speech programs. Since teaching and the ability to relate to students is high on our list of qualifications, this step is considered vital to the process. While students' evaluations do not dictate our choices, we tend to listen carefully to their impressions, and if the student response is negative, the candidate has great difficulty being hired.

Any candidate who survives all of these constituencies has ample opportunity to exhibit the three criteria which we seek, and has also had an opportunity to get a feel for the place to which he/she seeks access.

Teaching in a small school can be a very exciting and rewarding career choice. But a person needs to think seriously about preparing for the demands that this choice implies. Current graduate programs do not necessarily consider this career choice in their requirements for the PhD degree, and many candidates are not advised of this option while they are planning their programs. Should you find the small school a viable employment option, I would only hope that you would look carefully at your credentials, commitment to teaching and willingness to "fit in". Those of us on the hiring end most certainly will.

FOOTNOTES

[1]"Founding Our Institution Anew," Chronicle of Higher Education, November 7, 1984, p. 1

[2]"To Reclaim a Legacy: Text of Report on Humanities in Education," Chronicle of Higher Education, November 28, 1984, p. 19

[3]"Integrity in the College Curriculum," Chronicle of Higher Education, February 13, 1985, p. 15.

[4]ibid., p. 14

[5]"Founding Our Institution Anew," Chronicle of Higher Education, November 28, 1984, p. 1.